

By the Kansas State Historical Society

Zebulon Pike Explores Kansas

In 1806 the United States government sent Zebulon Pike to explore the southern part of the Louisiana Purchase. Pike was an army lieutenant. He led a small group of men from St. Louis, Missouri, to the Rocky Mountains. A mountain, Pike's Peak, was named for him. Pike saw it but never climbed it. It was later named in his honor.

Reason for Exploration

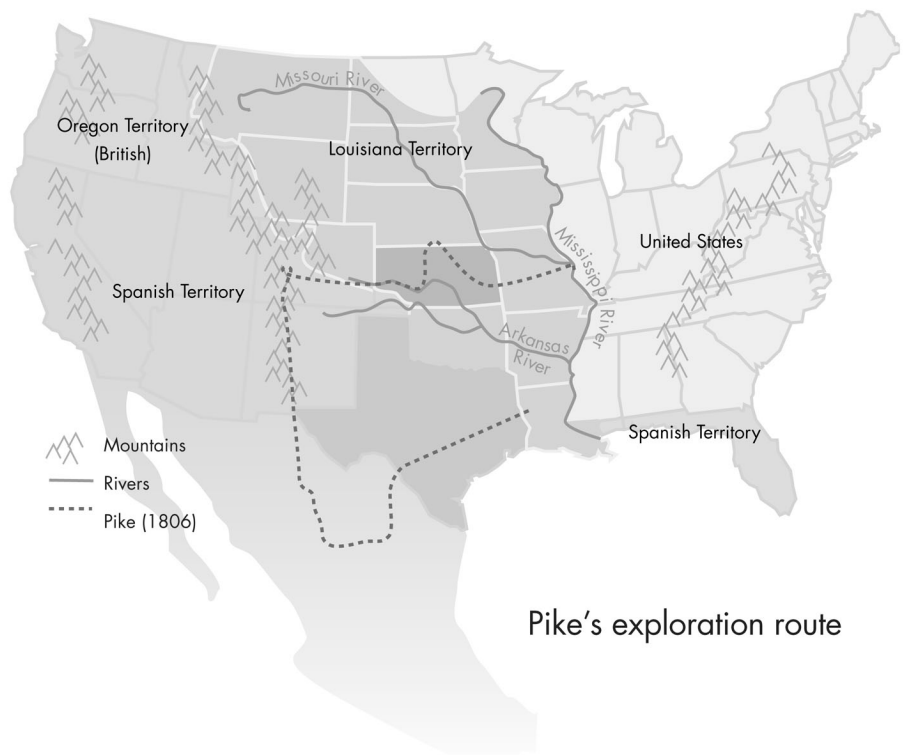
In 1803 the Louisiana Purchase became part of the United States. The western border was not clearly known. On the other side of the border, the Spanish ruled the land. Pike was sent to find where the Red and Arkansas Rivers began. This would help set the boundary between the two countries.

Pike also was told to escort about 50 Indians back to their homeland. He was to make peace between the Osage and the Kansa. He also hoped to meet with the Comanche.

Like Lewis and Clark, he was asked to study and report on natural resources.

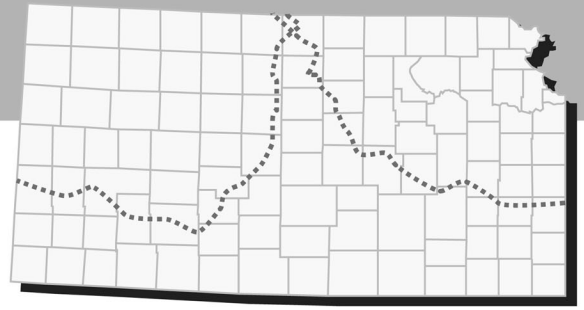


Lieutenant Zebulon Pike



Pike's exploration route

Pike's route took him across Kansas.



Experiences and Observations

Pike and his men came into Kansas near the present-day town of Fort Scott. As they traveled north, the explorers wrote down information about the Flint Hills. Pike believed that eastern Kansas had good grazing land. He believed that farmers and ranchers could use the land.

Pike met with a large group of Pawnee. They were flying a Spanish flag because of their friendship with the Spanish. He asked them to take down that flag and put up the American flag. After several days, Pike and his men moved on.

Pike followed the Arkansas River to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. By this time, it was winter. The weather was very cold. Pike and his men were captured by Spanish soldiers and taken to Mexico. They were arrested because they were exploring land owned by Spain.

The Spanish took away most of Pike's notes. He was able to keep some of his journals because he hid them. After six months and a long trip through Spanish land, Pike and his men were let go.

Results of Exploration

Pike published a report about his trip. He talked about the plains as "dry" and "sandy." Because of what Pike wrote, Americans did not settle in this area for many years. Pike wrote that the United States might trade with the Spanish. This increased interest in the Spanish Territory and helped develop the Santa Fe Trail.

AN ACCOUNT OF EXPEDITIONS
TO THE
Sources of the Mississippi,
AND THROUGH THE
WESTERN PARTS OF LOUISIANA,
TO THE SOURCES OF THE
ARKANSAW, KANS, LA PLATTE, AND PIERRE
JAUN, RIVERS;
PERFORMED BY ORDER OF THE
GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED STATES
DURING THE YEARS 1805, 1806, AND 1807.
AND A TOUR THROUGH
THE
INTERIOR PARTS OF NEW SPAIN,
WHEN CONDUCTED THROUGH THESE PROVINCES,
BY ORDER OF
THE CAPTAIN-GENERAL,
IN THE YEAR 1807.
By MAJOR Z. M. PIKE.
(ILLUSTRATED BY MAPS AND CHARTS.)
PHILADELPHIA:
PUBLISHED BY C. & A. CONRAD, & Co. No. 50, CHESNUT STREET. SOMER-
VELL & CONRAD, PETERSBURGH. BONSAI, CONRAD, & Co. NORFOLK,
AND FIELDING LUCAS, Jr. BALTIMORE.
John Minns, Printer, 1810.

People learned about Pike's expedition from his published report.